

## **AGENDA**

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- II. Merging Family Systems
- III. Kai's Family System
- IV. The First Day of Placement
- V. The Placement Continuum
- VI. The Suitcase Story
- VII. Role Play
- VIII. Holding Family Meetings
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## ***The Placement Continuum***

Initial Placement\_\_\_\_\_

Honeymoon Period\_\_\_\_\_

Supervised Visitation\_\_\_\_\_

Sibling Visitation\_\_\_\_\_

Unsupervised Visitation\_\_\_\_\_

Home Visits\_\_\_\_\_

Disrupted Placement\_\_\_\_\_

Therapeutic Appointments\_\_\_\_\_

Court\_\_\_\_\_

Case Reviews\_\_\_\_\_

Permanency\_\_\_\_\_

# Kai's Family System

## Kai's Family System

Kai is a seven-year-old bi-racial male child who will be placed in your home. Kai's mother is black and his father is white. Kai has three siblings: Jessica, 2, A' Marie 4 and Jared, 6. The youngest siblings were placed in a home together.

The children were placed in foster care for lack of supervision. Kai was found to be home in charge of his siblings for approximately 4 days with minimal food or heat.

Here are some facts about Kai's family system:

**Roles:** Kai is the oldest child and has been responsible for providing basic care for his siblings including making cereal, changing diapers and watching the children while his mother is out.

**Rules:**

1. When mom and dad are drinking, stay quiet and out of the way.
2. To save on the water bill, baths or showers are taken only once a week.

**Traditions:** Thanksgiving is spent at the Hosea William's "Feed the Hungry" mission.

**Extended Family:** Ostracizes Kai's mother because of her substance abuse; no contact with paternal extended family. Kai is best friends with his first cousin who leaves down the street.

**Family Operations:** No routines, no bedtimes. People are in and out of the house at all hours. The family mostly sleeps during the day and is up late into the night. This has caused Kai to miss many days of school.

1. How well would Kai fit into your family?
2. What problems would you foresee?
3. Since Kai comes from a mixed heritage, consider how you would be able to help me form a positive self-image.
4. What would be the best way to help Kai adjust to your family's routine?

# The Suitcase Story: A Therapeutic Technique

by

Written for Children in Out of Home Placement"  
Carmela Wenger, M.A.



Once upon a time there was a suitcase. It had been so many places that it was covered with stickers. Imagine a suitcase covered with stickers! There were so many address labels on the suitcase that it wasn't sure which label was the right destination. This made the suitcase very scared because it thought that it might get lost.

The suitcase remembered that once it had been brown with brass trim around its lid. When it looked in the mirror it could tell that it still looked like that. The problem was that more and more this suitcase was collecting address labels and stickers. After a while, the suitcase figured, all of its brown leather would be covered. Then it would forget what color it used to be. This bothered the suitcase. Another thing that was bothersome was the people who carried it around. Sometimes they left the suitcase in the rain. This wasn't done on purpose. The day would be clear and sunny when it was left. Later, clouds would gather and rain would start. The person who left the suitcase would come back and dry the suitcase off, but it took a long time to really dry and its brass trim would start to rust.

Another problem was that someone put it down really hard once and it hurt. Once a lady tore off an old address label to put on a new one. She tore it off so fast that it hurt too. Then she stuck the new one on top of the old glue without cleaning off the old glue. Because she hadn't cleaned off the old glue the new label didn't stick. One day the suitcase got really mad and decided to get even. It waited until it was all packed and closed. Then, as the lady was carrying it, the suitcase opened up. All of the lady's baggage fell out. Boy, was she mad! It took her a long time to repack everything. And then, the suitcase just fell open again.

For a while, the suitcase was glad it had gotten even. It thought of more ways to make trouble. It planned ways to make its handle fall off and waited to make sure that it would fall on someone's toes. After a while people did not trust the suitcase. They tied it together with a rope so it couldn't fall open. The rope didn't feel good; it made the suitcase madder. With the rope tied around it no one could see its brass trim.

Time passed and the suitcase moved some more. Every time it fell on toes or let all of its baggage fall out, its owner would sell the suitcase.

## The Suitcase Story: A Therapeutic Technique (Continued)

It got more stickers and labels. It also got some scratches and dents. The suitcase couldn't remember when it was new.

Finally, the unusual happened. A person named Jean brought the suitcase. The old owner said to Jean, "Watch out for this suitcase. The handle falls off and the latch flies open." This made Jean look very closely at the suitcase. "No wonder it suddenly opens," she said, "People expect it to hold too much. I won't put so much inside." The suitcase could hardly believe it. Jean put inside the suitcase only what it could easily hold. When she knew it was too full she carried it in her arms instead of tying it together with rope. The suitcase stayed closed and its handle stayed on. Jean and the suitcase got used to each other. One day Jean said, "there are so many address labels on it. Someone might not know it's mine." Jean took off all of the old ones; only she did it very carefully. Then she polished the brass trim. For the first time in a very long time the suitcase looked in the mirror and smiled. "I look O.K.," it thought.

One day Jean said, "I wish this suitcase could talk. It's been so many places. I bet it has had some interesting adventures." "Some adventures!" thought suitcase. "I've been dropped, left out in the rain, lost, rusted, dented, scratched." When the suitcase remembered it wanted to yell and scream and kick and just carry on in general. It carried on for a while. Then the mad went away and soon the sadness went away too.



Wenger, C. (1982). The suitcase story: A therapeutic technique for children in out-of-home placement. Reprinted from the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry April 1982 ppgs. 353-355

# I Said I'd Be A Foster Parent, Not A Chauffeur!

Written by:  
Gale Bouchillon  
Trainer/Homefinder  
Nova Foster Parent Project

Foster Mother: "Miss Smith, this is Mrs. Jones. I'm calling to tell you that you will have to take Chris to speech therapy from now on. I've had it! The orthodontist, the dentist, and the regular therapist – it's just too much. I won't do it anymore."

Case Manager: "It sounds like you really have a problem, Mrs. Jones."

Foster Mother: "Look lady, I don't have a problem, you do! It's not just the doctors. There's baseball practice, Sunday School, friends to visit, and who knows what else. It seems like I'm never out of the car with him. I need to have a life too. You're just going to have to do the driving. That's your job."

Case Manager: "It's not my job, Mrs. Jones! You're Chris's foster mother. You're the one who is responsible for his day-to-day activities."

Foster Mother: "Day-to-day activities! Chris is scheduled for enough activities in one day to keep another child busy for a month. You don't want a foster parent; you want a chauffeur!"

Case Manager: "It looks like we're both getting upset with one another rather than trying to solve the problem. I know how hard it must be for you to transport Chris to all of these activities. Being a foster mother is a difficult job, and you do it well. I'll bet sometimes it seems overwhelming."

Foster Mother: "Don't misunderstand. Chris is a nice little boy, and considering all he's been through, he's not that difficult to handle. Some days though, I feel like I could scream. I never have any time for myself anymore. I didn't know that

being a foster parent meant driving all over town. I thought you were supposed to do that.”

#### Managing the Impact: Holding A Family Meeting

Family meetings are organized family discussions with the goals of

- Discussing information;
- Clarifying information to reduce confusion or doubt;
- Problem solving; and to
- Strengthen the family system and relationships.

If there are children in the immediate family, here are some suggested topics of discussion:

- Sharing space and things
- Sharing parents with the new child
- Communicating with friends and neighbors
- How they feel about having a foster/adoptive sibling
- Best/worst thing they can think of regarding resource parenting.

Use the "Go Around" method. Go around the circle giving each family member the opportunity to respond to the topic.

Allow for open discussion on any problems or concerns.

Discuss what information that you will be able to share with the family about the foster/adoptive child.

Discuss what you have learned about the grieving process, discipline process, and contacts by the agency, and your role on the child welfare team and agency supports. Additionally, define the difference between foster care and adoption.

Listen for and acknowledge the feelings that are expressed, ask open-ended questions to clarify the problem, and then brainstorm solutions with the entire family.

Identify and resolve conflicts.

Plan for the child's entrance into the family.

Share with them the placement continuum.

Offer praise, encouragement, and thanks for the family's support.

# Soothing Those Jangled Nerves: Stress Management

## BACKGROUND

The housework is not done Mary needs her physical therapy, dinner is not started and what to do you mean my car is "Not ready yet!" Everyday life provides us with a combination of happiness, pride, personal fulfillment, and strength, while sometimes simultaneously creating frustration, sorrow, feelings of inadequacy, and pain. Life is complicated and ever changing. Change, by itself, creates stress. Whether we embrace the change or not, we will feel the ramifications of stress. Given the constant changing demands in our daily lives this becomes a major source of stress that is encouraged.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the body's response to a threatening condition. When confronted with stress, the mind tells the body that there is imminent danger and it must fight or flee. This "fight or flight" response is an instinctual process to help insure the survival of the species. In modern society, the stressful event may be a public speech or a deadline rather than a killer yak, but our body responds as if it were in danger of being destroyed.

Stress causes our muscles to tighten, our breath comes more quickly, blood flows more quickly to spread the increased oxygen throughout the body, nausea may set in and thinking becomes confused. Once the stress is alleviated, our body is in a weakened state as it recovers from the adrenaline surge. Unremitting stress can impair the immune system making it less able to resist the viruses that cause disease and can lead to a constant sense of exhaustion and loss of energy.

For family caregivers, the stress of parenting a child in care often causes physical and emotional symptoms that need to be addressed.

## SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Stress can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It is easily confused with symptoms of other problems. If not managed properly, stress may cause problems that can reduce our overall ability to function effectively. Some common symptoms of stress include, not only those mentioned above, but also:

- Frequent headaches
- Fatigue
- Constipation, diarrhea, problems with urination
- Increased use of alcohol, food, drugs
- Withdrawal from family/friends
- Difficulty/ inability to concentrate
- Irritability, hostility



- Feelings of nervousness, anxiety
- Feelings of inadequacy

## MYTHS ABOUT STRESS

1. **Stress is the same for everyone.** Stress is different for each of us. What is stressful for one person, may or may not for another.
2. **Stress is always bad for you.** Stress can overwhelm you or it can add years to your life. The determining factor is how well stress is managed. If effectively managed, stress can have the opposite effect.
3. **Stress is everywhere and is unavoidable.** This is a negative outlook. Try to take control of your life, and plan so that stress does not overwhelm you. Learning to delegate, prioritize, and plan can help you manage stress. As a wise person once said, “managing stress is like weeding your garden you can never get rid of the weeds completely, but you can keep them under control.

## STRATEGIES

Stress management is the way we respond and react to the everyday pressures and demands of life. Developing effective stress management skills are crucial.

**Get enough rest and sleep.** Although everyone does not have the same requirements for rest and sleep, the majority of us need at least seven or eight per night. Try to develop a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and get up at the same time everyday. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, stimulating activity and exercise prior to bed time. You may also want to develop a bedtime routine, like showering, soaking in a warm tub, reading, or listening to soft music prior to falling asleep.

**Breathing.** Deep breathing, when done properly, will relax the body even as it confronts high levels of stress or panic. It is physically impossible for muscle remain tense when deep, relaxing breaths are taken. When you feel the tension mounting, stop, close your eyes and take a few long, deep breaths. Be sure to breath through your diaphragm and not your chest. Feel the breath coming in through your nose and into your belly (your belly will actually rise) and allow the breath to expel through your mouth as your belly contracts. This pause only lasts a minute or two but can clear your mind and allow you to refocus your energy on the task at hand.

**Balance work and recreation.** Take time out for yourself and do something you enjoy. Consider scheduling a break into your busy day. Schedule five or ten minutes when you will stop working and do something you enjoy. Some popular choices: working on a crossword puzzle, walking around the house or building where you work, stepping outside for a breath of fresh air, singing, calling a friend to schedule a lunch date, or staring out the window. Learning to integrate joyful

moments into your daily life will go along way towards alleviating and preventing stress.

**Seek out support.** Having a network of supportive friends and acquaintances is a vital resource in coping with stress. Sharing and confiding can buffer the stress connected with life's daily hassles. It is important to remember that you are not alone and that others can understand and empathize.

**Movement.** Moving your body is an excellent way to dissipate stress. A formal exercise plan can be developed and followed, but a less formal approach will work equally well. Taking daily walks can go a long way in reducing stress and increasing your energy level. When you feel too tired to move, get up and dance, walk, or just jump in place. Doing so will increase the flow of blood through the body and to the brain and reinvigorate you for the tasks ahead.

Organize and manage time effectively. The three P's of effective time management that can assist you are as follows:

- *Prioritize* set goals for important things
- *Plan* schedule and set realistic time lines
- *Protect* learn to say no to unwanted demands and avoid time wasters

**Learn to laugh!** Laughter is truly medicine for the soul. Research has shown that laughter helps the body relax, enhances the immune system, and increases problem-solving abilities. Think about how good you feel after a hearty round of laughter: you are breathing more deeply, your face and neck are relaxed and you feel happier. Make a special effort to look for humor and the lighter side of things. Learning to laugh at yourself, as well as with others, will go a long way to reducing stress.

## SEEKING PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

Stress is a fact of life that requires permanent life-style changes to manage. It is easier with practice but you must be constantly aware of the symptoms and avoid slipping back into old habits. If you continue to have problems with stress you may want to seek professional help. When seeking help, find a caring, knowledgeable non-judgmental person to assist you. Consider a psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor minister, social worker, or counselor.

## SUMMARY

Stress is a reality of modern society. Everyone confronts it and everyone must know how they will live with it. For family caregivers, stress is often of a higher intensity and longer duration than for others, and requires diligence to manage effectively.

Recognizing the symptoms of stress will allow you to address the source before physical or emotional consequences become overwhelming. Learning to slow down, breath deeply, and see the humor in life will promote health and well-being.

